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SUBJECT: POLLS ON EU CONSTITUTION: ALL EVEN WITH LESS THAN
3 WEEKS TO GO

REF: A. (A) PARIS 3013 AND PREVIOUS

1B. (B) PARIS 2085

SUMMARY

11. (U) With less than three weeks to go before France's May 29 referendum on the EU Constitution, several recent public opinion surveys put the race in a statistical dead heat. One major poll shows an exact 50-50 split between 'yes' and 'no' among those who say they have decided how they will vote. Pollsters' estimates of the undecided vary between 30 and 20 percent of likely voters. Pollsters agree the electorate remains highly volatile, and that, for the moment, the 'yes' and 'no' are in unstable equilibrium with neither one gaining significantly on the other. END SUMMARY.

PHASES OF THE REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN

12. (U) Since March 4, when President Chirac announced the May 29 date for the referendum, the referendum campaign has gone through four phases. First, in a precipitous reversal of opinion, a 60/40 'yes'/'no' split became a 48/52 'yes'/'no' split in less than two weeks (reftel B). Second, from mid-March through most of April, the 'no' held the lead among decided voters by as much as 55 percent 'no' to 45 percent 'yes'. Third, after that high point (so far) in the third week of April, "the rising tide of 'no'" ebbed, with 'yes' regaining a slight lead over 'no' at the very end of April. Fourth, by the end of the first week of May, 'yes' and 'no' settled into their current, for all practical purposes, 50/50 equilibrium, with pollsters detecting a "wait and see" attitude among many in the large number of undecided. Also, pollsters are fond of pointing out that a significant portion of those who vote -- some use 20 percent as a rule-of-thumb -- don't make up their minds until the very day that they go to the polls.

LATEST POLLS SHOW STATISTICAL DEAD HEAT

13. (U) In a survey published on May 9 by the IPSOS polling organization, the French electorate is shown to be split evenly right down the middle -- with 50 percent of decided voters claiming they will vote 'yes' and 50 percent claiming they will vote 'no.' The preceding IPSOS poll, published one week earlier, showed a net advantage for the 'yes' camp by a margin of 53 to 47 percent. Another poll, this one published over the week-end of May 7 - 8 by TNS-SOFRES, revealed a slight advantage for those favoring approval of the constitution, with 52 percent of decided voters reporting they will vote 'yes,' versus 48 percent reporting they will vote 'no.' Also on May 9, the CSA polling organization published a poll showing a slight 51 to 49 percent advantage for the 'yes' camp; this is the third CSA poll in a row reflecting a slight edge for the 'yes' camp. All three polls indicate that a significant percentage of voters (20-25 percent) have yet to make up their minds, and might not do so until the day of the referendum.

COMMENT: AGE, SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND DECISIVE ISSUES

14. (SBU) Analysis of the poll results has identified trends among different socio-economic and age groups and also confirmed anecdotal evidence that voter response to a number of emotive issues unrelated to the constitution itself will be very important in shaping the results May 29.

The key strengths of 'yes':

-- older voters are overwhelmingly pro-Europe and turn out to vote; these voters have just been reminded by 60th anniversary commemorations of the end of WWII of the peace that is the deciding issue for them in favoring continuation of the European construction;

-- younger voters, also strongly pro-Europe, are most likely

to see Europe as an agent of positive change in their lives;

-- the argument that only through a strong and united Europe can France effectively protect itself -- jobs, industries, social model, etc. -- in a global economy dominated by the "the U.S. and China;"

-- the argument that voting 'no' is unpatriotic, weakening France's leadership role in a project -- European unification -- that the French have long supported by a 2/3 majority (according to decades of polling on the subject).

The key strengths of 'no':

-- the large majority of people of low and modest incomes are very apprehensive about their economic prospects; their instinct is to hold the line against change;

-- particularly among center-left voters, being for 'no' is a "movement" -- a political commitment that brings solidarity with others and engages political emotions;

-- 'no' is anti-establishment; popular dissatisfaction with France's ruling elites of both left and right runs very high, and voting 'no' vents anger and frustration that should not be underestimated. END COMMENT.
WOLFF